DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 390 845 SP 036 408

AUTHOR Ehman, Lee H.
TITLE Interdisciplinary Teacher Teams: A First Year's Experience in a Restructuring Middle School.
PUB DATE Apr 95
NOTE 27p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (San Francisco, CA, April 18-22, 1995).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Curriculum Development; *Educational Change; Faculty Development; *Interdisciplinary Approach; Intermediate Grades; Junior High Schools; *Middle Schools; School Restructuring; Teacher Attitudes; *Team Teaching; *Teamwork

ABSTRACT

This paper describes and interprets the case of a middle school's first year of using interdisciplinary teacher teams as a key among several restructuring moves. It describes: (1) characteristics of the teaming process--leadership, decision making, professional growth and support of individual teachers, and cooperation, competition, and conflict within and between teams; and (2) categories of teaming's "content"--what teams work on--including "kid talk," organizational detail and team/building maintenance, curriculum and instruction coordination and interdisciplinary planning, communication with students and parents, and inclusion issues. These patterns are interpreted in light of findings from other studies bearing on teachers' conceptions of their work, teaming, and middle school reform. (Author/ND)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

Interdisciplinary Teacher Teams: A First Year's Experience in a Restructuring Middle School

Lee H. Ehman
Indiana University

ED 390 845

Abstract

This paper describes and interprets the case of a middle school's first year of using interdisciplinary teacher teams as a key among several restructuring moves. It describes characteristics of the teaming process--leadership; decision making; professional growth and support of individual teachers; cooperation, competition, and conflict within and between teams; and categories of teaming's "content"--what teams work on--including "kid talk"; organizational detail and team building/maintenance; curriculum and instruction coordination and interdisciplinary planning; communication with students and parents; and dealing with inclusion. These patterns are interpreted in light of findings from other studies bearing on teachers' conceptions of their work, teaming, and middle school reform.

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

L Ehman

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

Presentation to the American Educational Research Association Annual Meeting, SIG: Research in Middle Level Education. Roundtable Session 18.35, "Middle School Educators and Their Work." April 19, 1995.

SP036408

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Introduction

Interdisciplinary teacher teams are one of several keys among restructuring moves advocated for middle level education:

> The student should, upon entering the middle grade school, join a small community in which people--students and adults--get to know each other well to create a climate for intellectual development. Students should feel that they are part of a community of shared educational purpose (Carnegie Council 1989, p. 37).

The emphasis of this recommendation is on the students. But what does middle school teaming mean for teachers? That is the focus of this paper, in which I present findings from a year-long qualitative study of a single school during its first year of interdisciplinary teaming. After describing characteristics of the teaming process and categories of teaming's "content"--what teams work on--the report develops issues and dilemmas for teachers engaged in teaming.

One of the orientations of this study is that school changes have histories; interdisciplinary teacher teams in middle grades schools are no exception, with the junior high and middle school reform (and re-reform) movements dating from the early 1900's. Cuban and others have laid out the historical development of junior high and middle schools, and what has happened over time to the original conceptions, goals, and programs of middle grades schools. Cuban (1992) argues that survival and stability tendencies of schools tend to transform attempts at fundamental reforms into incremental changes. There is an echo of this general claim in the present case.

The character of teacher work as a sociological construct has been developed in the work of Lortie (1975), Hatton (1985), and others. Teaching is dominated by norms of individualism, isolation from other teachers, and autonomy. This study inquires into what happens as the teaming process collides with these norms.

Methods and Data Sources

The school, with 1,300 students and just under 80 certified staff, is the only middle school (grades 6-8) in a relatively affluent, rapidly growing, ethnically homogeneous midwestern community of 25,000. The school staff planned and implemented several restructuring moves, including formation of interdisciplinary teams of teachers and operating autonomously within a bell-free block schedule. Also, at the beginning of the study, the school "detracked" the curriculum (except in mathematics), eliminated their honors program, and included most special needs students in regular classrooms.

The school created 13 teacher teams, four each in 6th and 8th grades, and three in the 7th grade, each with teachers of the four core academic subjects plus a special education teacher or aide. These teams were responsible for from 110 (6th and 8th) to 140 (7th) students. Two other teams represented across-grade combinations of "unified arts" and "wellness". Teams met daily for 45 minutes in addition to their regular 45 minutes of individual planning time; team leaders met weekly with the principal.

The research employs a case study method, in which I spent the entire 1993-94 school year attending classes, team and team leader meetings, parent meetings, and other school activities, I spent three days each week in the school, for a total of 110 days. I focussed most of my observation and interviewing in four teams; two 6th grade and one each in the 7th and 8th grades. For the first half year, I depended mainly on observation and informal conversation with parents, students, teachers, and administrators; during the second half, I added audiotaped interviews. Extensive fieldnotes, interview transcripts, and documents provided the data for analysis and interpretation. The present report focuses on the teachers' role and perspectives.

I analyzed the material for persisting themes, issues, and critical incidents, going back and forth between the emerging categories and concepts in my data, and the literature containing theory and research on middle school restructuring as well as teacher work.

Patterns of Process and Content in Teaming

Among the patterns I observed in this school's teaming were two broad categories. First, there were processes evident to me that no one talked about directly as they went about their business. The most important ones were: leadership, decision making, professional support, and an interrelated cluster of processes--cooperation, competition, and conflict.

Distinct from these processes were the principal content areas in which teams spent most of their time talking and acting. "Kid talk," organizational detail and team building, curriculum and instructional coordination and planning, communication with kids and parents, and inclusion issues constituted the content to which teams attended.

Teaming Processes

Teaming required special forms of leadership at the level of teacher groups as well as for the school as a whole. Leadership by the principal was crucial in teaming. She led weekly half-hour meetings each Friday in which the 13 team leaders plus 6th and 8th grade counselors discussed issues, brainstormed solutions to problems, and shared information and viewpoints. Through these meetings the principal provided a venue in which the team leaders, always under pressure from all sides, could interact with peers in the same situation. The team leaders obviously liked to share their problems and tensions with sympathetic counterparts. The principal sanctioned and encouraged this therapeutic venting, and it often made everyone feel better.

The principal was willing to have teams make many decisions about practices that heretofore had been centralized. She insisted upon ownership of the decisions by the teams making them, but at the same time gave them permission to make mistakes without penalties; the team leaders felt confident in her backing them should this happen.

Teaming meant that the total "amount" of leadership throughout the school increased substantially. The 13 new team leaders' thinking and acting, and the decentralization of decision making, meant that more people were exerting positive leadership in more areas of responsibility than was true before teaming was instituted.

Most teachers benefitted from the opportunities for professional growth and support inherent in the teaming situation, although there were some isolates and resisters, and these individuals added stress to team processes. Many teachers reported reinvigoration of their thinking resulting from sustained contact with colleagues. Group problem solving and sharing of professional thinking in the team planning context fulfilled teacher needs. Sharing of lessons, units, tests, and teaching techniques were important to most teachers. This interaction with peers, with its give and take of ideas and sharing of insights and experiences, broke down some teacher isolation. Most reported feeling more professional support and colleagueship than they had experienced before in their careers.

However, establishing and sustaining new relationships meant that previous ones waned. Former allegiances with friends were often weakened. Also, more team identification led to less affiliation with 7th and 8th grade departments (the 6th grade was a non-discipline oriented department by itself), given the 45 minutes devoted each day to team planning. While still important, the academic departments held less sway than before.

Instances of cooperation, competition, and conflict within and between teams emerged as the year progressed. Within the 6th grade the already-established cooperation among the 16 teachers continued across their four teams. This was exemplified by use of their four previously developed language arts thematic units, requiring team cooperation in scheduling and sharing class sets of novels.

There were instances of competition between teams at all three grade levels. Within grades, teams often competed for public prizes and recognition. But a more subtle competition existed between teams for practices and symbols that would distinguish teams' identities. These were sometimes shared, but as often the team leaders and members wished to keep them for their own teams only so that their "teamness" would remain intact. This led to instances of conflict and bad feelings, sometimes vented in Friday morning team leaders' meetings.

Administrators and teachers (as well as parents) had conflicting expectations for between-team consistency, sharing, and individuality. Some teams developed and tried to preserve their group identities by withholding information about valued practices, while others tried to share approaches and solutions that "worked." In some cases parents complained that teams were doing things so differently that their children were disadvantaged by being on certain teams. These issues strained relations between some teams, and cross-pressured the principal and team leaders between conflicting norms and values.

The Content of Teaming

Within teams, the content of teacher work was dominated by "kid talk"--sharing information and problem-solving about individuals' academic performance and misbehavior--with emphasis on misbehavior. Teams talked about kids and their problems in the halls before and after school, in the lunchroom, and in team meetings. Little of the talk was gossipy--the teachers mostly tried as professionals to address individual situations and ways to solve problems. Much of the support process outlined above was situated within this "content" area--sharing insights about particular students, including similar behavior patterns observed in different classes. Teachers felt good about contributing to one anothers' ability to understand and help students on their team, and the mutual support for disciplining unruly minds and hormones was appreciated by all. They reported having sources of help (from one another) in the team situation they'd never had before.

Often linked to kid talk was extensive preparation for and communication with students and their parents. This included numerous formal team-student and team-parent conferences, bringing changes in quantity and quality of interactions with parents. While teachers still met one-on-one with students, they rarely met alone with parents; much team time was devoted to parent meetings. One team I observed extensively had a regular procedure for preparing for these meetings, taken from a handbook on school-parent interactions. They nearly always went into the

meetings with parents with a plan for eliciting information, suggestions, and support from the parents, to involve them in solving the problems they were dealing with; the team also usually rehearsed roles they were to play and lines of suggestions and arguments they might make with the parents, as well as necessary plans for followup actions by all parties.

Teams also spent much time organizing and coordinating the details necessary for operating as a team. Because this was their first year, they had to create patterns and specific solutions to problems often not encountered by individual teachers before teaming. Next to kid talk, this kind of team content took the most amount of time and energy, both within the team meetings as well as outside them.

The term "interdisciplinary teams", used in this school, suggests that the teams act together in blending instruction and curriculum into interdisciplinary form in the classroom. However, most of the pedagogical planning work done by the teams involved coordination and timing. There were examples at all three grade levels of pairs of teachers working together to integrate their subjects while teaching interdisciplinary units, and the 7th grade conducted an "International Activity" during March which involved some interdisciplinary work, especially for social studies, language arts, and fine arts (little mathematics or science was involved). Yet these were exceptions. Teachers within teams were undoubtedly better informed about what subjects were being taught by other teachers, but the actual working

together on curriculum was not the norm, despite the rhetoric about this goal. Some teachers commented to me that this would change over time; the first year's teaming necessarily had to emphasize setting norms and practices, and getting organized and coordinated. Interdisciplinary curriculum would follow in subsequent years, they believed.

Another aspect of teaming was dealing with the newly-added stress of inclusion of special needs students in regular classrooms. Almost every team had a special education teacher or aide (often referred to as "resource" teachers) as a regular member. How and where this person would work was continually being negotiated and monitored. Resource teachers provided individualization for some of the special education students, especially when extended projects were being worked on, and during tests.

In some cases the resource teachers were well integrated with the other team members, meeting with them regularly and taking an equal part in discussion and decision making. In other teams the resource teachers were marginalized, clearly not treated as peers by the regular content teachers.

The special students were a constant source of concern and discussion in team meetings. Teachers perceived them as contributing more than their share of misbehavior. Some teams devoted considerable time to convincing parents to have chemicals prescribed in order to moderate their behavior. Others attempted to have parents have their children "tested" (by school

psychologists) so they might be classified as emotionally disabled, and thus qualified for the school's "special" (segregated) classroom. In one case, a team had to deal at length with a parent couple who threatened legal sanctions against the school for what they believed to be unfair treatment of their child in the team. The "content" of inclusion did not require as much time and effort as some of the other areas, but it was present across teams I observed throughout the year of the study.

Issues and Dilemmas

I now turn to several issues and dilemmas marking the work of these first-year teams. For this analysis they are framed within the constant tension between "ideals" of middle school philosophy as held by many of the teachers and administrators in this case study, and the "reality" perceived by them. The five team-related "ideals" are:

Detracking

Parent involvement

Inter-team cooperations and sharing of successful practices

Interdisciplinary curriculum

Decentralization of school decision making

The school was successful, to some degree, in moving closer to each of these ideals. However, each of the changes posed dilemmas, and there were accompanying stresses for many involved.

Detracking had been accomplished along with teaming, except for the mathematics curriculum, by the elimination of the honors program and other ability grouping practices previously in place. This was a very controversial change, and during the previous year there were numerous meetings of faculty as well as those involving parents. A influential parents' group had finally declared themselves in favor of detracking during the February prior to the year of this study. Most but not all of the teachers supported the middle level philosophy of detracking, and worked hard through their teams to make it a reality.

By the middle of the year, however, there was growing talk in meetings of teams and grade-wide teacher meetings of the need for what was called "grouping for instruction." Some teachers and teams began to institute within-class and within-team ability grouping for substantial periods of time to cluster students of higher or lower ability levels for units of instruction and large projects. One 8th grade team in particular attempted to "group for instruction" in its language arts classes.

Another aspect of detracking was the move to an inclusion model for students labelled "Learning Disabled" (groups of "Moderately Mentally Handicapped" and "Emotionally Disabled" were largely taught in separate classrooms, despite the claim by the school of a "full-service inclusion model"). Previously taught mostly in pull-out situations, the LD-labelled students now were part of the regular classrooms. In the 6th grade team of 112 students I worked in during much of the year, the teachers had as

many as 16 LD students full-time, and two ED students for at least some of their classes. Working with these students taxed the energies of the teachers, and while many teachers related in interviews that there were benefits of inclusion, there was also a widespread feeling that this aspect of detracking carried a heavy cost for teachers and students alike. Many parents echoed some teachers' fears that "normal" children were being held back academically because of inclusion.

While the school made several moves toward the ideal of detracking--elimination of honors classes and ability grouped classes, and inclusion of special needs students in regular classes--by the end of the year there was growing sentiment that readjustments were needed. Few advocated a complete return to the former ability grouping structure, but the call for "grouping for instruction" was heard clearly. Some teams had begun to experiment with this idea, perhaps foreshadowing a process of "retracking."

Another part of middle school philosophy is <u>parent involvement</u>.[1] Whenever parents inject themselves into the processes of schooling questions must arise about how much say they will have, and in what arenas this influence will be welcome by educators. In the present case there were boundaries between parents and teachers on teams that were constantly invoked and commented upon.

---

[1]I portrayed parent involvement in some depth in another paper given at this conference (Ehman 1995).

At one level, teachers on teams welcomed parents into the problem solving process surrounding individual students needing support, encouragement, discipline, and sanctions at home. Nearly always this kind of parent involvement was viewed by teachers as supportive and non-problematic. However, parents also raised broader questions about school issues, and when these focussed in a critical way on teaming processes and activities, teachers sometimes tried to "draw the line" between what they believed was within their professional purview, and outside interference by parents.

For example, each of the three 7th grade teams organized special field trips as rewards for students who avoided infractions of team rules. Not only were there parent complaints about within team consistency of rules leading to perceived unfairness to some students, but some parents also believed there were across-team inconsistencies in team rules, how they were interpreted and enforced, and therefore in how students might be rewarded or punished with the field trip privileges. In a more academic example, the 7th grade International Activity, requiring weeks of planning and preparation, drew criticism of parents for differences across teams of expectations, guidelines for students and parents, and grading of student efforts.

Teachers in these instances took strong exception to the parent involvement, believing that only they, the teachers, had a complete picture of the situations, had the best interests of all the students in mind, and had the professional knowledge and

experience to make the necessary decisions. Some parents, having heard the welcoming rhetoric of parent involvement invoked by school administrators and teachers, felt that the invitation was less than fully sincere. I heard teachers and parents alike referring to "the line" representing this boundary between the professional and lay views of what should happen in this middle school. Teachers were keen on maintaining the boundary, while parents sometimes wanted to be more actively involved in school decision making. Thus, the parent involvement ideal of middle level education posed a dilemma--and no little stress--for all concerned.

Throughout the planning for and implementation of interdisciplinary teaming, cooperative learning was always part of the conversation. Several of the teachers had attended workshops and conferences on this subject, and throughout the year a special interest group of from 15 to 20 teachers--more than a quarter--met regularly to discuss and share their classroom experiences with cooperative learning.

There was a distinct generalization to teaming of the ideal of cooperation and sharing. Throughout the weekly team leader meetings the principal and nearly all the team leaders reiterated their commitment to learning from one another about successful team practices. No longer would teachers be isolated in their curriculum building and instructional decision making, given the daily planning efforts. Conversely, teams would share ideas with other teams, reinforcing the middle school spirit of cooperation.

There was a lot of across team sharing. But there was also competition and at times conflict between teams. The central tension was between building and maintaining distinctive team identities that would promote bonding and identity within teams, and the ethic of cooperation and sharing across teams. The more sharing of special ideas, activities, and symbols, the less a team preserved what it had tried to create--its own distinctiveness. During team leader meetings during the fall, the principal referred several times to an end of the year session involving all faculty in which the teams explained and discussed what worked well and badly for them, with the goal of learning from one another cooperatively, and being able to use others' ideas in improving all teams. Notably, this never happened. The end of the year was marked by within team celebrations, across team competitions, and a general celebration of "teamness." The principal's goal of cooperation and sharing seemed undermined in part by the need for teams to remain different.

A fourth middle school ideal is interdisciplinary curriculum. Each regular academic team included teachers from language arts, mathematics, social studies, and science. An explicit goal for the school, and within teams themselves, was to promote more interdisciplinary curriculum and teaching. Yet I observed little of this, with some notable exceptions, as pointed out above.

The dilemma for teachers was, in part, divided loyalties. Academic departments had long constituted the primary group with whom most teachers identified most strongly in school. Teaming injected a new force, a competition for these old loyalties to departments. The plain fact that 45 minutes of each day was devoted to team planning meant that less time and energy were available for department meetings and activities. Teachers across the school commented to me about this shift away from departmentalization.

However, this by no means meant that departments were no longer viable, nor influenced the curriculum and instructional decision making in the school. Department chairpersons still had much influence over these matters, particularly in mathematics, where the continuation of tracked classes signalled this power. The language arts department devoted considerable attention during the year to across grade articulation issues. Particularly in the 7th and 8th grades, teachers continued to identify themselves as subject matter teachers first and foremost, despite the middle school emphasis on breaking down disciplinary boundaries in the curriculum. Teams planned and organized in many domains, but rarely for interdisciplinary teaching.

More than one team included a renewed emphasis on this unachieved goal for the following year. During the spring some teachers brought back from workshops enthusiasm for creating thematic units, which invited interdisciplinary connections.

It is important to note that during this first year of interdisciplinary teaming the teachers were learning as they went, needing to devote most of their efforts to creating teams and building experience with heretofore unknown processes and demands. Perhaps during subsequent years, after the teaming patterns are solidly in place, teachers' attention will turn to integrating instruction across subjects.

Most progress toward the middle school philosophy came in decentralizing school decision making. The teams represented much of the new locus of influence in how the school did its business. One key example was the school's schedule. During the year prior to implementing teaming, the schedule was revised so that each grade level was on a different pattern, and within each grade level individual teams could vary their teaching and other activities without consulting with the principal. Bells marking the passing between periods were no longer used. The more flexible schedule was a visible symbol of the shift in decision making.

Another example was that students with discipline infractions were no longer referred automatically to a counselor or principal. The most serious problems--such as fighting--were still handled this way, but most often the team members discussed and tried to solve these problems without sending students to the office. Teams met with individual students and occasionally with groups; they also met with parents (sometimes accompanied by students) as well. Much energy was directed at this general

phenomena, and teams made many decisions regarding discipline formerly exercised by administrators.

Toward the end of the school year, after each team had spent hours upon hours with discipline issues, widespread teacher frustration became evident. The problem was not so much that teachers felt their energy had been misdirected as that assistant principals (especially one of the two) were not consistent in "backing them up" when their decisions about serious discipline cases were overlooked or overturned. Therefore, this widespread disaffection with the way discipline was being handled marked the year's end, with extensive discussions within teams and in grade level teacher meetings. There was a year-ending faculty meeting in which they tried to put in place a coherent and consistent set of rules and processes. Thus, the decentralization of decision-making had its price in the area of carrying out student discipline.

Another price was paid by the team leaders. For every decision formerly made by the principal or her assistants, there was new information to be learned, new factors to be considered, and the need for achieving consensus and action. Complaints about the demands on team leaders' time were a constant refrain in team leaders' meetings, team meetings, and individual interviews. By the end of the year several team leaders had considered turning over their role to another teacher, largely for this reason. During the following (the present) year, plans were in place to rotate half the team leaders every two years,

mostly because of the pressure and burnout resulting from so many new required decisions and actions. While teachers generally relished their new found power over school decision making, the decentralization had costs as well.

Interpretations

After only one year of study, one marking only the first year of interdisciplinary teaming in this middle school, it is difficult to draw solid pictures from the evidence. However, I close this paper with some interpretations framed by others' work on the phenomena I focussed on here.

Teacher Isolation and Individuality

Teaching has been depicted as dominated by norms of individuality, privacy, isolation, and autonomy (Kasten, Short & Jarmin 1989). Referring to the work of Lortie (1975) and Hatton (1985) they argue that teaming cuts against these norms. Working from their own case study, they find that the teams

> ...provided a counterbalance to the isolation of the classroom. Focus on the concerns of children provided a common interest for the teams. Team organizational structure provided for common planning times, formal and informal meeting times, and a recognized structure for collegiality. Though teachers still worked independently and autonomously in classrooms for the most part, significant parts of teachers' work, specifically the motivation and control of children, became matters of team concern and what would ordinarily be "private troubles" were "transformed into public issues" (Whitford and Kyle, 1984)...the teams also provided support for individual teachers. (p. 76)

This picture mirrors very closely what I found in my case study.

Teacher isolation was reduced for most, and there was relatively little evidence of active resistance to perceived threats to individuality, privacy, and autonomy, although some resisted passively, and thereby added stress to team processes. Most teachers drew great satisfaction and professional support in coming to know and work closely with other professionals. They also believed they knew students in their teams much better than before ("kid talk" dominated team meetings in mine and their case), and that combining ideas with team members in addressing students' needs was effective.

Kasten, Short & Jarmin also note little evidence for actual curriculum integration (pp. 75-76), which is congruent with what I saw. The one sharp discontinuity between their case and mine was that in theirs little teacher involvement in school decision-making was evident. This might be because in their case no team leaders were formally designated and only two 42-minute planning periods were included in the regular school week.

A survey study by Mac Iver and Epstein (1991) examined teaming (as reported by principals) in a broad sample of 1,753 middle schools, calling teaming one of several instances of "responsive practice" emerging in middle level education (p. 587). They, too, emphasize reduction of teacher isolation as one benefit:

> Many proponents of the middle-school philosophy view the establishment of interdisciplinary teams of teachers as the keystone of education in the middle grades.... They hypothesize that IT's will eliminate the isolation that many teachers feel by providing a working group of colleagues to conduct activities and discuss and solve mutual problems;

> that instruction will be more effective in schools that use IT because of increased integration and coordination across subjects; and that teachers on a team sharing the same group of students will be able to respond more quickly, personally, and consistently to the needs of individual students. (pp. 596-597)

Departments and Teams

Mac Iver and Epstein report that principals believe teaming, with its supportive conditions for teachers and students alike, result in stronger overall school programs (p. 587). However, the principals see subject matter departmentalization also tied to program strength:

> ...schools that emphasize departments (with department heads, common planning periods for departments, and teacher teams within departments) are more likely than other schools to also organize and emphasize interdisciplinary teams.... This indicates that a departmental emphasis and an interdisciplinary team emphasis coexist in many schools. (p. 598)

In light of my own case study, this survey finding is puzzling. My interpretation holds that there is a tradeoff between teaming and departmentalization, where strong departmental identification tends to lessen the impact of teaming on teachers' instruction and curriculum decision-making; strong team identification tends to weaken affiliation to departments. Mac Iver and Epstein's observation about coexistence of these two orienting forces in middle schools might be correct, but as seen (in my case study) through teachers, not principals' eyes, as teams strengthen influence over teachers, departments' power weakens.

In the middle school I studied, the advent of teams led to

teachers' redrawing the social and psychological circles with which they situated themselves in their work. As identification with teams strengthened, many teachers loosened their ties with academic departments and previous friendship groups.

Leadership

Another interpretation from my case study has to do with leadership. As I noted above, teaming as implemented in this middle school meant the growth and decentralization of leadership. This relates to teachers' work roles as well. Thirteen new leader roles were created as part of the team structure. As years go on in this school, leadership will rotate to new individuals, so that many teachers eventually will experience their work as heads of teams. This adds a significant element to what it is to be a teacher. Not only does teaming weaken isolation and promote group problem solving, but it also brings the expectation that the teacher role includes leadership of peers. A recent conversation with the principal, now involved in working through leadership changes on half the teams, reinforced this notion. Some teachers resist leadership, she reported, but others seek it out, some unexpectedly. No researcher I know of has addressed teaming's adding leadership to the teacher's role, and I intend to focus on it during the next school year.

Historical Context

Finally, Cuban's (1992) historical examination of reforms in middle level education provides an important backdrop against which to view the present case. After laying out the original creation of junior high schools and their subsequent absorption of high school goals and practices, he moves to the more recent "Middle Schools Movement," in which he characterizes it as "...in the tradition of reforming an earlier reform" (p. 242). As he explains, it hasn't succeeded in fundamental changes (which he distinguishes from incremental changes):

> The vivid markers of junior highs remain in reorganized middle schools: departmentalization, teachers teaching separate subjects, short class periods of around 50 minutes, teacher-centered instruction, students grouped by ability for certain classes, and little correlation of content between departments. (p. 246)

This is a blueprint for what I saw.

Further, I have some evidence supporting Cuban's thesis that attempts at fundamental changes are subverted into incremental ones through organizational survival and stability mechanisms. For example, the school detracked at the same time as teams were instituted; the entire year was spent wrestling with detracking and retracking possibilities, with some teams beginning to re-create high-achieving and remedial grouping.

Another example: Although coordination and integration of curriculum and instruction is supposed to be a hallmark of middle grades teaming, this took a back seat to other activities. Instead of the planned year-end concentration on teams planning thematic and interdisciplinary units, it actually ended with

extended discourse and some conflict between several teams and the administrators over how best to handle discipline situations.

There is change going on in this middle school, and positive outcomes are being realized. But the change is slow and is, in Cuban's terms, incremental rather than fundamental. Interdisciplinary teaming is part of a long historical process and not a recent, isolated phenomena, as claimed by some of its advocates. Cuban reminds us that reforms are sometimes reforming an earlier reform, and are not ahistorical. Successful middle schools can and do exist, he concludes, but

> They exist in circumstances that nourish the slow development and institutionalization of fundamental changes: local leadership, sufficient resources including staff time, parental awareness, stable staff, and teacher understanding of what a middle school is. (pp. 246-247)

The interdisciplinary teaming I observed might be part of this slow, historical process. It has brought about some positive educational change, but efforts to achieve ideals are tempered by perceived realities. Whether interdisciplinary teaming generally is a reform that will last is an important question facing middle level educators.

List of References

Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development (1989). Turning Points: Preparing American Youth for the 21st Century. New York: Carnegie Corporation.

Cuban, L. (1992). What happens to reforms that last? The case of the junior high school. American Educational Research Journal, 29(2), 227-251.

Ehman, L. (1995). Rhetorics and realities of parent involvement in schools: A case of a restructuring middle school. Unpublished paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, San Francisco, April 17.

Hatton, E. (1985). Team teaching and teacher orientation to work: Implications for the preservice and inservice preparation of teachers. Journal of Education for Teaching, 11, 228-244.

Kasten, K., Short, P. & Jarmin, H. (1989). Self-managing groups and the professional lives of teachers: A case study. Urban Review, 21(2), 63-80.

Lortie, D. (1975). Schoolteacher: A Sociological Study. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Mac Iver, D. & Epstein, J. (1991). Responsive practices in the middle grades: Teacher teams, advisory groups, remedial instruction, and school transition programs. American Journal of Education, 99(4), 587-622.

C:\WP51\CO\TEAMING\AERAPAP.495